

~~TOP SECRET~~
TS// 185942

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 March 1966

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 11-66

SUBJECT: Probable Reactions to a Postulated Program for Bombing
North Vietnam (Draft for Board Consideration)

ASSUMPTIONS

A. Attacks would be made on selected fixed targets, regardless of location, including all POL storage facilities, the Haiphong cement plant, military barracks shown by reconnaissance to be occupied, and military supply centers.

B. These attacks would be executed in a short period of time and with sufficient force to be effective.

C. Major seaports would be mined.

D. Key fixed targets on the LOC's, particularly between Hanoi/Haiphong and the Chinese border, would be hit, with re-strikes as necessary.

E. Sustained day and night armed reconnaissance would be maintained over these LOC's and others, including coastal and inland waterways.

F. US/ARVN pressures on Communist forces in South Vietnam would continue to increase.

GROUP I
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and declassification

~~TOP SECRET~~

DISCUSSION

I. GENERAL

1. The postulated program would be seen by all observers as escalation to another stage. Ending the exempt status of the Hanoi/Haiphong area and the zone near the Chinese border, mining the harbors, and the concentration of the fixed-target attacks into a brief period of intense activity would all contribute to this conclusion. Observers would see the action as a strong demonstration of US will to prevail through force. It would also appear to most as a dangerous step toward further escalation at a later stage, perhaps leading to US attacks on the North Vietnamese population and a Sino-US war.

2. The program includes a number of targets in moderately to densely populated areas.* There would certainly be destruction of homes and institutional buildings and a considerable number of civilian casualties. This would provide the Communists with photographs and sights to show foreign reporters, which would enhance the effectiveness of their propaganda. If the bombing of

* (A footnote will identify these targets.)

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

those targets in heavily populated areas happened through mischance to kill far larger numbers of civilians than prestrike estimates indicate, world opinion would indeed be shocked and general opposition to US policy would be strengthened.

II. COMMUNIST REACTIONS

A. North Vietnam

3. At the Outset. The North Vietnamese leaders would quickly recognize that the US was applying a substantially raised level of pressure and that the costs of continuing to support the insurgency in the South would be higher than before. They would not be likely to believe it impossible to carry on, however, and their will to persist would be reinforced by pledges of increased Soviet and, especially, Chinese aid. Hanoi would continue to focus on developments in the South as the main determinant of its policy.

4. The more damaging bombing program, along with continued increase of US/ARVN pressures on Communist forces in the South, would force Hanoi to reconsider where its policies were leading. Alternative courses of policy would be de-escalation through

- 3 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

negotiation overtures and/or a step-down in the fighting, or escalation by sending much larger numbers of PAVN forces to the South in the hope of gaining a relatively quick defeat of Allied forces there.

5. We believe it highly unlikely that the North Vietnamese leaders would choose either of these alternatives, at the outset. They would probably see a major change from the established policy as fraught with danger and uncertainty. They would be much more likely to continue their present policy for some time, hoping that the forces already committed, plus those being readied for infiltration, would secure a victory. These calculations would be reinforced by Hanoi's faith in the "correctness" of its policies and a reluctance to accept facts which contradict its preconceptions.

6. Use of North Vietnamese Fighter Aircraft. US air attacks on critical targets on the main LOC's to China and, more particularly, in the Hanoi/Haiphong area would confront the North Vietnamese leaders with a difficult decision: whether to use their air force against apparently hopeless odds or to concede it to be useless. We think the chances better than even that, in this situation, they would see no point in conserving their

- 4 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

air force and would engage the attackers. They would probably hope for some military results but would count more on demonstrating their courage and on provoking a crisis at the outset of the US program, raising fears of escalation through the involvement of Chinese or even Soviet air power. If the US responded by attacking the airfields, the surviving North Vietnamese aircraft would probably flee to Chinese bases; as to subsequent air defense policy, see paragraph 10 on China.

7. Over the Longer Term. As the US aerial campaign unfolded, it would become manifest to the North Vietnamese leaders that the US, at least at this stage, was not bent on an unrestricted attack aimed at final destruction of the regime. And Hanoi, we estimate, would find itself able to continue its support of Communist forces in the South, albeit at greater cost. Judgment on future policy would still depend on Hanoi's estimates of (a) the course of the war in the South, measured against the higher costs to the North, and (b) the ability of the North to continue to absorb damage. Of these, the former would likely continue to be the critical one.

- 5 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

B. Communist China

8. Our general view of present Chinese intentions is that Peking hopes and intends to avoid war with the US. This view is supported by many of China's official statements, by the caution which marks Chinese behavior, and by the logic inherent in the disparities of Chinese and US military power. It is possible that we are wrong. Mao may think a Sino-American war inevitable, and as well fought sooner as later; he may identify Chinese interests more closely with the military fortunes of North Vietnam than we appreciate; he may take a different view than we of the military capabilities of the two sides. But we continue to believe that China will not be lightly provoked, and it is this estimate which underlies the following consideration of specific contingencies. If China should react in ways different from those we foresee, the reason will probably lie more in some fundamental misapprehension on our part of the sources of Chinese conduct than in the specific circumstances of the case.

9. At the Outset. The Chinese almost certainly expect the US to increase its pressures on North Vietnamese military and logistic facilities. They would thus be unlikely, even in the early stages, to conclude that the postulated attacks were aimed

- 6 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

at destruction of the North Vietnamese regime, although there would be an immediate heightening of apprehension over further US intentions. More particularly, Peking would be faced with the need for an early decision on air defense of North Vietnam.

10. Its decision would be affected by the way the air war had developed. If the US engaged the North Vietnamese fighters only in the air, sparing the airfields, the chances are about even that the Chinese would supply more aircraft. Peking would probably be less willing to replace the Vietnamese air force if it had to supply Chinese pilots as well as aircraft. If the US struck the airfields and the Chinese accommodated the fleeing remnants of the North Vietnamese air force, we think that the chances are less than even that Peking would allow them subsequently to operate out of Chinese airfields to engage US aircraft over North Vietnam. It is even more unlikely that the Chinese would, at this stage, try to defend North Vietnamese airspace with the Chinese Air Force, and they almost certainly would not permit the Soviets to operate out of Chinese bases for this purpose.

11. Over the Longer Term. Soon after the nature of the new US policy had become apparent, Peking would increase the flow of

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

Chinese logistic and antiaircraft units to North Vietnam in response to likely requests by Hanoi. In time, Chinese military personnel in North Vietnam could be playing the major logistic and air defense role, at least in the region between Hanoi/Haiphong and the Chinese border. Peking would also continue or increase its shipment of military materiel and economic necessities to North Vietnam, although movement of these goods would become increasingly difficult and costly.

12. The Chinese leaders are leading advocates of "protracted struggle" as a means of advancing communism. A prolonged stalemate in the Vietnam war would be acceptable to them. They could avoid a definitive decision on war and peace for China until such time as the US/Allied effort appeared to be prevailing in the North and the South and there was a prospect that, despite Peking's urging, Hanoi would seek peace and abandon the Viet Cong insurgency. At this point, the Chinese would have to decide whether to accept a serious setback or to intervene directly in large numbers against the US/Allied forces. By the time this point had been reached, many other changes in the situation would have occurred, making prediction highly speculative. We believe, however, that confronted with this dilemma the Chinese leaders would prefer a

- 8 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

setback, which they would consider temporary, to a war with the US which would almost certainly mean the bombing of China.

13. Mutual escalation of the air war could confront Peking with such a decision much earlier. If either North Vietnamese or Chinese aircraft operated from Chinese bases to attack US aircraft over North Vietnam and the US responded with attacks on Chinese bases, Peking would have to choose between halting its air action or engaging directly in a war with the US. It is this predicament which led us to estimate in paragraph 10 that Peking would not let its airfields be used directly in the air defense of North Vietnam. Although using Chinese airfields to fight an air war over North Vietnam could reflect a gross miscalculation by the Chinese, we consider this highly unlikely; if the Chinese took such an action, they would almost certainly regard it as highly risky. We therefore conclude that conducting the air defense of North Vietnam from Chinese bases would mean that the Chinese were willing, if necessary, to take the succeeding steps toward war with the US.

14. Over the longer run there is another danger. Already there are large numbers of Chinese in North Vietnam working on LOC's and air defense, and the postulated US program would almost certainly cause these numbers to rise substantially. Most of the

- 9 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

weapons used by the PAVN and many other essentials now come from China. As the conflict develops, it is possible that step by step it will become less Hanoi's and more Peking's war. In time, China could become the chief antagonist by almost imperceptible increments. Both Peking and Hanoi, however, are aware of this danger, and both, for differing reasons, wish to avoid it.

C. Soviet Reactions

15. The USSR would be concerned by the US action for several important reasons. The new bombing campaign would demonstrate the ineffectiveness of Soviet-supplied air defense to deter to the US. The mining would also challenge the USSR to take countermeasures, since much of the Soviet nonmilitary aid to the DRV comes by sea. And the total effect of the new US policy would be to put the remaining supply line to the DRV under Chinese control and thereby weaken the Soviet position in Hanoi. Thus the USSR would probably come under much greater pressure to challenge the US.

16. At the outset there is little the USSR could do. It would almost certainly offer more SAMs and fighters and probably send more personnel if necessary. If the DRV aircraft shifted to Chinese bases, however, the Soviets would be much more reluctant

- 10 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

to continue their support. Since the mines in the harbor could not be neutralized, the Soviets would probably not risk their ships.

17. Over the longer term, Soviet response would depend greatly on the DRV. The Soviets would prefer that Hanoi turn toward negotiations, but failing this the Soviets would probably have to consider more decisive action against the US. They might feel compelled to try to break the port closure. Or they might offer some offensive weapons so that the DRV could retaliate against the US bases and carriers. Or they might try to put pressure on the US in Berlin, though European developments make this especially unattractive at this time. While we cannot estimate what new measures the DRV, USSR, and China could agree on, in general we believe the Soviets would have to involve themselves more deeply in the war, and that US-Soviet relations would be worsened.

D. Free World Reactions

18. Non-Communist reactions to the postulated program of US attacks would probably follow the general patterns of past US courses which raised the level of hostilities. There would be increased concern with possible widening of the war, along

- 11 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

with increased determination to avoid military involvement and to keep any economic and social involvement in South Vietnam to lowest feasible levels. The exceptions to this general pattern would be only those already involved directly, the GRC, South Korea, Australia, and Thailand. They would favor the course of action. No nation would be likely to make significant changes in its policy toward the US or the Vietnam war as a consequence of this course of action. However, the mining of Haiphong harbor would cause certain political problems for the traditional maritime powers and would probably evoke protests from some of them. The initial spurt of attacks on previously exempted targets, producing civilian casualties magnified by DRV propaganda, would agitate those who already disapprove of US involvement, but this effect would subside over time.

25X1A9a


TOP SECRET

UNCLASSIFIED when blank — TOP SECRET when attached to Top Secret Document — Automatically downgraded to SECRET when approved for release at 1999/09/10 from controlled document 25X1A9R000100280008-2

CONTROL AND COVER SHEET FOR TOP SECRET DOCUMENT

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION		<p align="center">O/NR TS# 185942 17 March 1966 STAFF MEMO # 11-66 12 T pgs. TOP SECRET</p>	REGISTRY	
SOURCE			CIA CONTROL NO.	
DOC. NO.			DATE DOCUMENT RECEIVED	
DOC. DATE			LOGGED BY	
COPY NO. 29				
NUMBER OF PAGES				
NUMBER OF ATTACHMENTS				

ATTENTION: This form will be placed on top of and attached to each Top Secret document received by the Central Intelligence Agency or classified Top Secret within the CIA and will remain attached to the document until such time as it is downgraded, destroyed, or transmitted outside of CIA. Access to Top Secret matter is limited to Top Secret Control personnel and those individuals whose official duties relate to the matter. Top Secret Control Officers who receive and/or release the attached Top Secret material will sign this form and indicate period of custody in the left-hand columns provided. Each individual who sees the Top Secret document will sign and indicate the date of handling in the right-hand columns.

REFERRED TO		RECEIVED				RELEASED		SEEN BY		
OFFICE	SIGNATURE	DATE	TIME	DATE	TIME	SIGNATURE	OFFICE/DIV.	DATE		
DNE	[Signature]	25X1A9a		17 Mar						
FE	[Signature]									
OKR/A	[Signature]	25X1A9a								

NOTICE OF DETACHMENT: When this form is detached from Top Secret material it shall be completed in the appropriate spaces below and transmitted to Central Top Secret Control for record.

DOWNGRADED		DESTROYED		DISPATCHED (OUTSIDE CIA)	
TO		BY (Signature)		TO	
BY (Signature)		WITNESSED BY (Signature)		BY (Signature)	
OFFICE	DATE	OFFICE	DATE	OFFICE	DATE
Approved For Release 1999/09/10 : CIA-RDP78S02149R000100280008-2					

TOP SECRET